



Lessons Learned: **Fighting the Invasion of Big Poultry in Oklahoma**

by Katherine Un with
Senator Paul Muegge

Big Poultry has vassalized Oklahoma, invading its rolling prairie lands with no less than 609 actively registered poultry operations, which produce 58.8 million birds a year for an astounding average of 96,500 birds per year per operation. Each day Big Poultry tightens its hold on the Sooner state by successively converting economic power into political capital and then in turn using its political power to rid itself of barriers to its economic growth; barriers like fair market rules and account-

ability to the American people. While Big Poultry continues to reap billions, it ravages the social, political and environmental health of its fief.

Senator Muegge, former Oklahoma state senate Agriculture Committee Chairman and OCM Board member, talks to us about holding strong against Big Poultry when he was in office to pass a 1998 bill that limited neighboring properties' exposure to concentrated animal feedlots.

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FROM THE
President
by Don Stull



What are we doing here, indeed! And how did we get here? Much like the prophet Elijah, who God spoke to on Mount Horeb, America's farmers and ranchers face clear and present threats. Elijah's life had been threatened by Jezebel; the livelihood of today's family farmers and ranchers is threatened by the greed of multinational corporations and the indifference of federal and state governments.

We live in turbulent and unsettled times, far more so than when Wendell Berry published his 1978 classic, *The Unsettling*

of America. Fewer than one in every 100 Americans farms for a living, and only 16 of every 100 small family farms reaps the majority of its household income from farming. Industrial agriculture and its factory farms are eroding our soils, polluting our waterways, eliminating small diversified farms and the jobs they create, and harming rural communities. Federal trade and food policies are blocking farmers' access to markets, depressing prices for their crop and livestock, and threatening the food security of our poor and disadvantaged friends and

Federal trade and food policies are blocking farmers' access to markets, depressing prices for their crop and livestock, and threatening the food security of our poor and disadvantaged friends and neighbors.

neighbors. Suicide rates among farmers are the highest they have been since the farm

crisis of the 1980s. The rates of opioid addiction and drug overdoses in the countryside far exceed those in our cities. (See "Renew-

ing a Vision for Rural Prosperity" by Mary Berry and Debbie Barker, *Civil Eats*, August 15, 2018.)

As Harwood Schaffer and Darryl Ray noted in their 2018 column, "Whose agricultural and food policy is it, anyway" (Policy Pennings 941), food should be available at prices people can afford. Farmers and ranchers need policies in place that will ensure them fair market prices that cover the full cost of production, including a fair return on their labor. But these laudable goals are not well served by federal policies. Rather, farm bills over the last several decades, including the 2018 farm bill, are designed to enable agribusiness to maximize its profitability. And it has done so at the expense of independent family farmers and consumers.

By the time you read this, I'll be in Sweden, where I will be spend seven weeks as a visiting researcher and scholar at Lund University as part of a year-long seminar on changes in protein production and consumption. I was invited because of what I can tell them about animal agriculture and processing in the United States, but I intend to learn as much as I can about how animals are raised and meat is processed in Sweden and elsewhere in Scandinavia. I look forward to sharing what I learn with OCM members and other readers of this column. Meanwhile, Vaughn Meyer, OCM vice-president, will fill in for me. I know he will do an admirable job.

Vi ses! (See you later.) ^{DS}



And he came thither . . . and, behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him, "What doest thou here, Elijah?"

First Kings 19:9



Webinar #1: Drs. Mary Hendrickson and Harvey James

New Online Seminars for OCM Members

by **Angela Huffman**

We are kicking off 2019 with a one-of-a-kind educational opportunity for OCM members. In our new series of online seminars – also known as “webinars” – national leaders share their research and expertise on current anti-monopoly issues.

In 2019 we will hear from Drs. Mary Hendrickson and Harvey James of the University of Missouri, Barry Lynn of the Open Markets Institute, Andy Green of the Center for American Progress, and more antitrust thought leaders.

In February, Drs. Mary Hendrickson and Harvey James gave an extremely informative presentation on what it means have fair and competitive

markets and how to evaluate unfairness within a concentrated market. Their work assesses the reasonable expectations farmers and others have when interacting with the agriculture markets. When claims of unfairness are raised by farmers or others within the food system, how should policy makers in our capitols and judges in our courtrooms think about the claims of unfairness? Too often when we are fighting for equity and fairness, we lose the argument about what is “fair” because we have lacked this research.

Learn more by viewing this informative webinar online at <https://competitivemarkets.com/webinars>.^{AH}

LESSONS (continued from page 1)

Senator Muegge received the JFK Profile in Courage award for his tenacity in seeing this legislation through.

The forces that you're fighting are so powerful and so oriented with their financing. We got through that in 1998 but it was a bloody battle.

There were a lot of families that had a chicken house on their family farm. The litter wasn't that big of a problem back then. What happened over time was that the corporations came in and said 'You have to build a new building, a new watering system. It's going to cost you \$25,000 here and \$15,000 there' and they forced their contract growers to modernize and build the fa-

cilities. In effect, they were avoiding having to capitalize their production system. They were going to the bank with the neighborhood farmer and helping them get a government guaranteed loan to build the chicken houses! They just had the farmer, little land owner, locked into an economic system that was untenable. How they got away with this I'll never know. I had to deal with some corporate folk at Tyson. It was interesting. It was just getting on the horse and riding. You just didn't quit. I grew up being told that hard work and using your head was important. I took my work seriously. I didn't even have a single poultry grower in my senate district, but I knew this was what I had to do.

Big Poultry's enormous power in Oklahoma grows stronger with consolidation. The number of operations steadily decreases each year while the number of birds produced by each operation never ceases to grow. Compared to our current 609 poultry operations with an output of 96,500 birds per operation, in 2002 the Sooner state was home to 1,096 farms but each farm had a lesser capacity of 69,000 birds per farm. The consequences of consolidation are dire. Since the arrival of concentrated swine and poultry production in the early 1990s, the number of agricultural jobs in Oklahoma has declined by 77%. The state started losing agricultural jobs in 1969, the same year it began allowing corporations to engage in farming and ranching. As Senator Muegge explains, the ripple effects of the loss of agricultural jobs are far reaching.

Consolidation has had a tremendous detrimental effect upon our rural communities. We're at the end of the generation that lived out there on the farm. Now we've got a lot of people who have jobs in town and are raising their families out there on the farms. That generation that's being raised out there on the farms right now, they're not going to end up in production agriculture. When I was in the legislature in the 90s, we saw how we were losing our healthcare entities in our rural communities. We were losing our hardware stores. The funeral homes - I mean they didn't even need funeral homes! So now you drive for miles and you drive through these rural communities that have one convenience store. They don't even have a chamber of

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MEMBERSHIP *Report* by Pat Craycraft

JOIN OR RENEW TODAY

Thank you for joining and renewing your memberships with OCM. If you have not sent in your 2019 dues, please do so today. The support of our members is critical to OCM's fight for traditional family farmers and our values, as we work to build a new food system — one that better serves people, animals, and the environment. By becoming a member, you will have access to the information and tools you need to join the fight.

Below are the various levels of membership:

INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP

As an Individual Member (\$50) you will receive OCM's informative bimonthly newsletter, be invited to attend our bimonthly webinar where national leaders will discuss current anti-monopoly issues,

and receive our news roundup by email.

As a Voting Member (\$125) you will receive all the benefits of an Individual Member, and you gain the right to vote at OCM membership meetings, setting the course of OCM's future.

As a Sustaining Member (\$500) you receive all the benefits of the Individual and Voting Member, plus you will have access to the inside strategies of OCM's ongoing campaigns through bi-monthly one-on-one conversations.

ASSOCIATE ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIP

OCM's strength comes from collaborating with other like-minded organizations. Let OCM provide you with the information and services you need to succeed by becoming an Associate Organization Member.

As a \$200 Associate your organization will receive OCM's informative bi-monthly newsletter, your organization and its mem-

bers will be invited to attend our bimonthly webinar where national leaders will discuss current anti-monopoly issues, and you and your organization will receive our news roundup by email. Through OCM's website portal, you and your organization will have access to a toolkit for each of OCM's major campaigns that you can use and brand as your own or jointly with OCM. These will include sample talking points, letters to the editor, social media graphics and telephone scripts.

As a \$500 Associate your benefit package will include OCM staff availability and two conference registrations, giving you a head start on attending OCM's annual conference.

As a \$1,000 Associate your benefit package will include in addition to those listed for the membership levels above booth space and recognition at our annual conference.

Membership is January-December. Please make checks payable to OCM, P.O. Box 6486, Lincoln, NE 68506 or pay by debit or credit card through our secure, online system at www.competitivemarkets.com/membership.^{PC}





CAPITOL ROUNDUP

by Joe Maxwell

ON THE HILL

CHECKOFF REFORM:

By the date of this Newsletter, we expect that Senators Lee (R-UT) and Booker (D-NJ) will have reintroduced the OFF Act (Opportunities for Fairness in Farming). Congresswoman Titus (D-NV) is expected to introduce the legislation within the next month. OCM and the many stakeholders continue to set this as a Hill priority. With over \$850,000,000 in mandatory federal assessments being paid by farmers and ranchers into the checkoff programs, it is time they became transparent and accountable to those who are paying into them.

OCM is a strong supporter of the checkoff programs; what we and the many stakeholders object to is the administration of the checkoff programs. The OFF Act will not end checkoff programs nor will it cut the dollars going to the programs' boards. What it will do, just like other federal taxpayer programs, is set taxpayer accountability standards. The major reform provisions of the OFF Act, are:

- Stop federally mandated checkoff dollars from being transferred to parties that seek to influence government policies or action relating to agricultural issues.

- Enforce the prohibition against conflicts of interest in contracting and all other decision-making operations of the checkoff programs
- Stop federally mandated funds from being used for anti-competitive programs or from being spent to disparage another commodity in the marketplace.
- Increase transparency of the individual boards' actions by shedding light on how federal checkoff funds are spent and the purpose of their expenditures.
- Require audits of each program every five years to ensure their activities are in compliance with the law.

MORATORIUM ON MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS:

By the time you are reading this, OCM

expects The Food and Agribusiness Merger Moratorium and Antitrust Review Act will have been filed in both the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives. If adopted, this legislation would immediately put a halt to further acquisitions and mergers in the agriculture and food sectors until such time as Congress can review the harm that monopoly power has had on farmers, workers, and our rural communities. Why does it matter? If the legislation would have been in effect last year, Germany's Bayer acquisition of Monsanto would not have been approved and two companies would not control 77% of all seed corn. Also, Brazil's Marfrig, the second largest beef processor in the world, would have been blocked from acquiring a majority interest of National Beef Packers, the fourth largest U.S. beef processor. With Brazil's JBS already being the leading U.S. beef producer, China's Smithfield already being the leading pork producer last year's mergers should be

setting off National Security alarm bells in the U.S. Capitol. We must stop the concentration of our agriculture markets by these transnational corporations before there is not one U.S. company and farmer left standing. It is time to hit the pause button. We hope we can count on your help.

THE UNITED STATES MEXICO CANADA TRADE AGREEMENT (USMCA) and COOL:

The USMCA has also been referred to as the "New NAFTA," and has been signed by President Trump. The USMCA must be stopped in the U.S. Congress until such time as Country of Origin Labeling is included in the terms of the agreement. While many want to explain why or how the President's trade deal with Mexico and Canada was lacking provisions, such as COOL, that benefit America's independent agriculture producers, OCM's position is these are hollow explanations and, it's time to act. Do not be fooled by Big Ag's claims that the USMCA is a done deal. Congress can force to have the lan-

guage changed and have it added to the implementing legislation—they have done so in the past. They acted when they were not satisfied with the U.S. trade agreement with Peru. We are working with others to push the U.S. House and U.S. Senate to take the same steps to include COOL in the terms of the USMCA. Failing in that effort, Congress should kill the USMCA. All Farmers, ranchers, rural communities, and all who eat agriculture products need to call their members of Congress and say vote no on USMCA until mandatory Country of Origin Labeling for beef and pork are added to the terms of the agreement.^{JM}

NO COOL; NO USMCA!

LESSONS (continued from page 4)

commerce anymore. They have a rural volunteer fire department that manages to be the function of the rural community.

Since he left the legislature, Senator Muegge is focused on getting his archival files and some of his life experiences in the historical center in Oklahoma City. He speaks to both the younger and older gen-

erations of our movement for independent family agriculture about the importance of legacy and the path forward in our fight to freeing ourselves from Big Poultry's stranglehold.

I'm really concerned. We're not going to put the leaves back on the trees. We're not going back to where we were. I'm eighty-two years old and I don't think that in my lifetime I'm going to see much change from where we're at now so I tell young people – you got to pay attention, my generation was the one the screwed this up and at some point, you're going to have to get this thing figured out, straightened out, and take control of it. You're going to have to pay attention about what's going on and recognize the fact that the future is in the people's hands. We cannot let these corporations dictate everything from our education to the seeds that we plant. That's what they want to do. They want absolute control over your livelihood. And the younger generation has got to realize that nobody is going to do this for them. They do need to talk to some of us that have been through some of this. Leave a little bit of tracks. A little bit of legacy.

It's up to us.

I'd like to thank Senator Muegge for taking the time to be interviewed for this piece. ^{KU/PM}

MAKING A DIFFERENCE?

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- ___ Other Donation: Amount \$ _____

Associate Organization Membership

- ___ \$200: Organization receives bimonthly newsletter and webinar, weekly email news roundup, and campaign toolkits
- ___ \$500: Same benefits as \$200 level, plus OCM staff availability and two conference registrations
- ___ \$1,000: Same benefits as \$500 level, plus a booth and recognition at annual conference

All members will receive the bi-monthly newsletter electronically, unless you mark this line for a mailed copy: ___

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MARCH | APRIL 2019



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